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## 2. Introduction

### **Washington State Department of Natural Resources**

DNR is steward of about 2.8 million acres of state-owned uplands consisting of Federal Grant trust lands and State Forest trust (formerly known as Forest Board Lands, and DNR is steward of about 2.4 million acres of state-owned aquatic lands. These lands are managed by DNR for the benefit of current and future citizens of Washington State. The area covered under the Cypress Island Comprehensive Management Plan encompasses over 11,000 acres of state-owned uplands and aquatic lands (see Table 1).

#### **Federal Grant trust lands**

Through the Congressional Enabling Act of 1889, Washington became a state and acquired more than 3 million acres of land to be managed to provide revenue to build public schools, universities, and other state institutions. Early on, some trust lands were sold, but lawmakers realized that over time the lands could be managed sustainably to earn a continuous flow of revenue for the beneficiaries, and offer many other benefits for the people of Washington.

#### **State Forest (Forest Board) trust lands**

Under acts of the Washington State Legislature in 1923 and 1933, the State of Washington was enabled to acquire land by purchase or transfer from the counties. Westside counties acquired most of these State Forest trust lands after they were logged, abandoned, and tax delinquent. With no resources to manage the lands, they deeded them to the state to manage forever as commercial forests that earn revenue to help fund local library, hospital, fire and other taxing districts, county services within the county where the lands are located; and contribute to the state general fund earmarked for schools

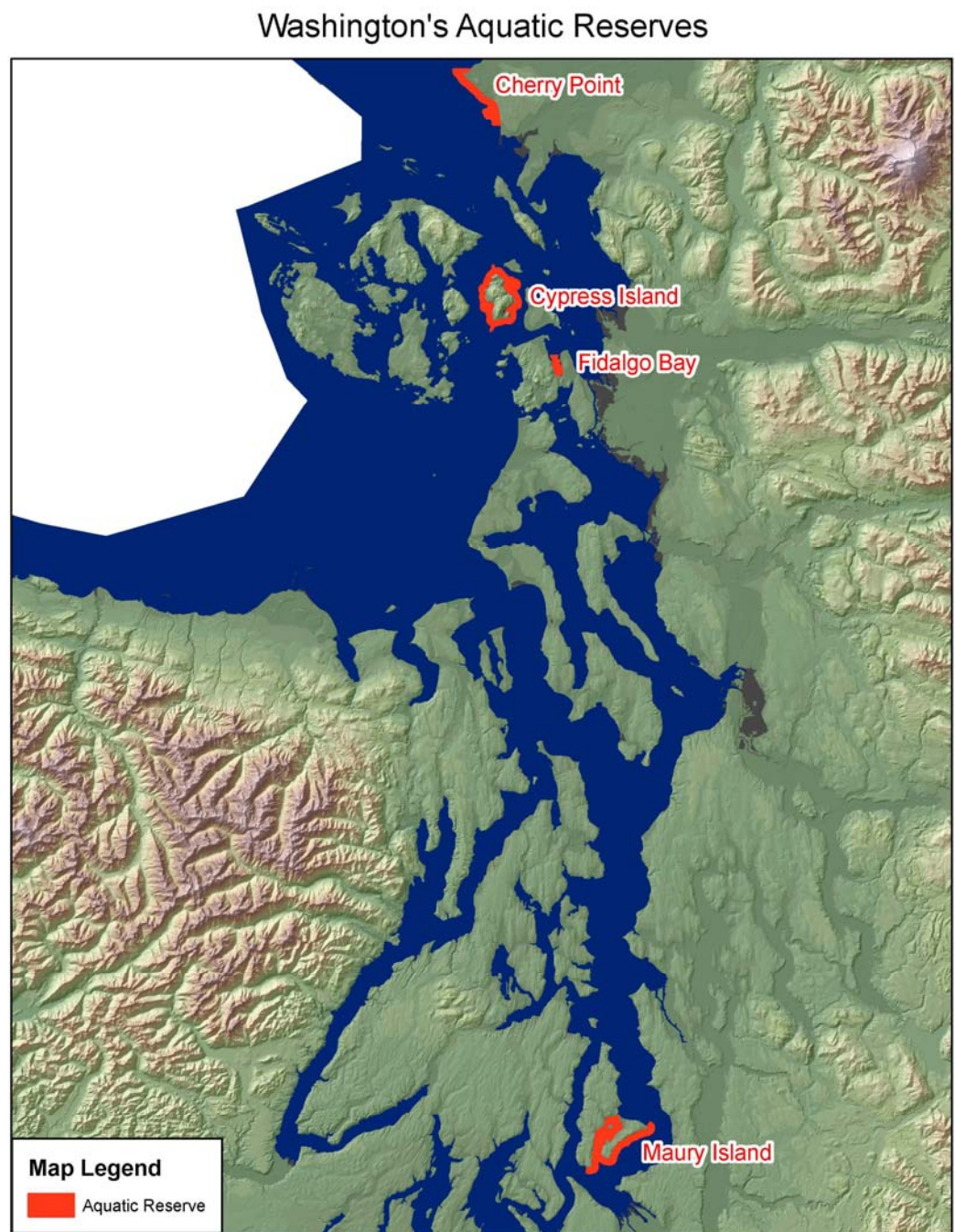
#### **Natural Area Preserves**

Established by an act of the Washington State Legislature in 1972, high quality natural habitats are acquired by gift or purchase by the DNR. Natural Area Preserves (NAPs) are managed for the perpetual protection of rare species and outstanding ecosystems native to



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**Figure 3: Washington State Aquatic Reserves**



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## The Cypress Island NRCA

Cypress Island was selected to be a Natural Resources Conservation Area because:

- It is the largest relatively undeveloped island in the San Juan Islands, where extensive areas of undeveloped shoreline and uplands are becoming rare.
- The island contains unusual geological characteristics, outstanding examples of native biological communities, critical habitat for federally protected species, and significant marine and cultural resources.

The Cypress Island NRCA protects more than 5,100 acres of high quality forest, wetland and grassland communities and surrounding state-owned tidelands. The southern two-thirds of the island is the only protected low-elevation serpentine forest in Washington and may support unique plant communities. The island's grassy balds, talus slopes, high quality wetlands, streams, lakes and forests are home to rare and common plants and animals, including threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

Cypress Island provides a scenic reminder of conditions in Western Washington prior to Euro-American settlement. Steep island topography provides vistas of the San Juan Islands, mainland Washington and the Olympic and Cascade mountain ranges. Cypress Island is a popular destination for boaters, offering recreation opportunities, scenic viewpoints, lakes, and miles of trails.

### Natural Resources Conservation Act

In the late 1980's, the Washington State Legislature responded to an increasing and continuing need by the people of Washington for certain areas of the state to be conserved for the benefit of present and future generations. The Washington State Natural Resources Conservation Act, Chapter 79.71 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), was thus enacted in 1987. To be considered for NRCA designation, land and/or water should have important ecological, geological, cultural or scenic characteristics and opportunities for low-impact public use and outdoor environmental education.

### NRCA management goals include:

- Maintenance, enhancement, or restoration of ecological systems, including but not limited to aquatic, coastal, montane, and geological systems, when such systems are unique or typical to Washington State.
- Maintenance of exceptional scenic landscapes.
- Maintenance of habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.
- Provision of opportunities for low-impact public use, scientific research and outdoor environmental education.

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## NRCA Boundary

The NRCA boundary (Figure 4) contains all state-owned lands and tidelands plus other lands which meet the legal criteria for acquisition by the state for NRCA designation (see glossary, NRCA Boundary). The NRCA boundary is approved or changed through a review process, which includes a public hearing. DNR is authorized to acquire full or partial ownership of land within the NRCA boundary only from willing sellers or through voluntary land donation. **Private lands within the NRCA boundary are not restricted by this management plan or by inclusion within the NRCA boundary.**

Within the NRCA boundary, approximately 4,028 upland acres are managed under the current Cypress Island Comprehensive Management Plan as NRCA and 1,073 acres of NAP are managed under the Draft Cypress Highlands NAP Management Plan. The NRCA boundary also includes the tidelands adjacent to Cypress, Strawberry, and Cone islands. Approximately 520 acres of private tidelands and uplands are within the NRCA boundary, including approximately 115 private parcels ranging from less than one acre to thirty acres (see Table 1).

## The Cypress Highlands Natural Area Preserve

The Cypress Highlands NAP was originally established to preserve an undisturbed example of grassland dominated by Roemer's fescue and associated forest communities underlain by basalt bedrock. This designation of 156 acres in 1975 and 54.75 acres in 1979 created what is currently the north unit of the NAP. The central and south units were established in 1989 when additional lands were added to the NAP through a common school trust land transfer of approximately 620 acres. These units preserve plant communities and wetlands underlain by serpentine bedrock, with associated wildlife, on the southern portion of the island. Subsequent acquisitions of smaller parcels from private landowners brought the total acreage of the three units to 1,073 acres.

## Natural Area Preserves Act

The Natural Area Preserves Act was enacted in 1972 by the legislature to “secure for the people of present and future generations the benefit of an enduring resource of natural areas by establishing a system of natural area preserves, and to provide for the protection of these natural areas” (RCW 79.70). Preserves are identified through an organized scientific inventory process that is guided by the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan. The purpose of establishing NAPs is:

- To protect outstanding examples of rare or vanishing terrestrial or aquatic ecosystems, rare plant and animal species, and unique geologic features.
- To serve as baselines against which the influences of human activities in similar, but differently managed, ecosystems can be compared.

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- To provide areas which are important to preserving natural features of scientific or educational value.

Site-specific management plans are developed for each NAP in order to give priority to protecting the natural feature that led to the designation of each site as an NAP, and to maintain natural processes.

The Cypress Highlands NAP is managed under the terms of the Draft Cypress Highlands NAP Management Plan (1993) and the Highly Sensitive Areas section of this plan. (Section 5.1.1).

## **Cypress Island Aquatic Reserve**

Cypress Island was selected as an aquatic reserve because this site represents valued aquatic resources, excellent upland conditions and opportunities for coordinating upland, intertidal and subtidal management. The specific environmental attributes of the site include:

- The connectivity of the reserve area to the upland NAP and NRCA management units. The state ownership managed by DNR includes about 90 percent of the tidelands, 100 percent of the subtidal bedlands, and about 93 percent of the adjacent uplands at Cypress Island, with the emphasis of management on conservation. In addition, uplands of the Cone Islands are owned and managed by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.
- The size of the reserve, which encompasses the complete geographic area of Cypress Island and associated satellite islands.
- The position between the San Juan Islands and the Strait of Georgia oceanographic regions.
- The excellent condition of local habitat, including aquatic vegetation, intertidal and subtidal rocky reef habitat, nearshore and intertidal areas, and marine riparian areas.

Included within the reserve are the subtidal marine waters of Cypress, Cone, Strawberry, and Towhead islands. These islands comprise an important component of the reserve as they are surrounded by shallow rocky reef habitat. North Towhead Island and south Cypress Island also include shallow offshore areas. The shallow areas to the north and south of the reserve include valued rocky-reef habitat that supports declining bottom-fish resources in the area, including rockfish (*Sebastes spp.*), which are listed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife as a species of state concern, and lingcod (*Ophiodon elongatus*).

## **Legal Authorities for Establishing Aquatic Reserves**

The constitutional authority for the proprietary management of state-owned aquatic lands is derived from Articles XV and XVII of the Washington State Constitution. DNR is directed by the state legislature in RCW 79.100 through 79.145 to manage state-owned aquatic lands to provide a balance of public benefits that include encouraging public access, fostering water-dependent use,

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ensuring environmental protection, and utilizing renewable resources. In addition, DNR is directed to generate revenue from state-owned aquatic lands when consistent with the other legislatively directed public benefits.

RCW 79.90.455 identifies environmental protection, the overarching goal of the Aquatic Reserves Program, as one of DNR's primary directives for the management of state-owned aquatic lands. RCW 79.10.210 further authorizes DNR to identify public lands that can be utilized for their natural ecological systems and withdraw these lands from all uses that conflict with this purpose. WAC 332-30-151 directs DNR to consider for Aquatic Reserve status those lands with educational, scientific, and environmental values; it also identifies management guidelines for aquatic reserves. WAC 332.30.106(16) defines environmental reserves as sites of environmental importance, which are established either for the continuance of environmental baseline monitoring, or as areas of historical, geological, or biological interest requiring special protective management.

### **Aquatic Reserve Boundary**

The Cypress Island Aquatic Reserve (Figure 4) is part of the San Juan Archipelago. The site includes the state-owned bedlands surrounding Cypress Island, including those adjacent to Strawberry Island and Cone Islands from the mean high tide line to a water depth of 70 feet below mean lower low tide or one half mile from the extreme low tide, whichever is further seaward. The site is bounded to the west by Rosario Strait, on the south and east by Bellingham Channel, and on the northeast by an unnamed channel (Figure 4).

## **Purpose of the Comprehensive Management Plan**

This current management plan is intended to coordinate management of the three different designations of conservation lands on Cypress Island (NRCA, NAP, and Aquatic Reserve) over the next 50 to 100 years, and to serve as DNR's primary management guidance for these lands.

## **Desired Future Conditions**

Desired Future Conditions describe the overall target conditions for a landscape and provide guidance for developing management goals and objectives. The following describes the future public use and resource conditions expected on Cypress Island when the management goals and objectives in this plan are achieved:

Public use facilities will be concentrated in a relatively small area of the island to protect the natural characteristics and habitat qualities of Cypress Island and provide public access to a sample of each of the outstanding natural characteristics of the island. Marine resources will be protected with appropriate installation of buoys and designation of public use areas and activities. Environmental interpretation will accompany development to enhance public

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enjoyment and encourage public participation in protection of the NRCA. Public use will be closely monitored. Where use levels or activities are incompatible with resource protection, use will be controlled, sites may be closed, and new sites may be developed on the NRCA or elsewhere in the region. No new facilities will be developed within the NAP.

Natural processes (see Glossary) are the primary force in the restoration and maintenance of the island's outstanding natural characteristics. Cypress Island management emphasizes the promotion of region-wide biological diversity by protecting native species with particular attention to those reduced in numbers (rare) in the region. Natural processes will be maintained without interruption, creating a mosaic of habitat types and features that support native species. Active management will be dedicated to restoring excessively disturbed and degraded areas and enhancing habitat.

Action will be taken to encourage public involvement, community stewardship, and volunteer participation in the protection and maintenance of this land.



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## Cypress Island Ownership

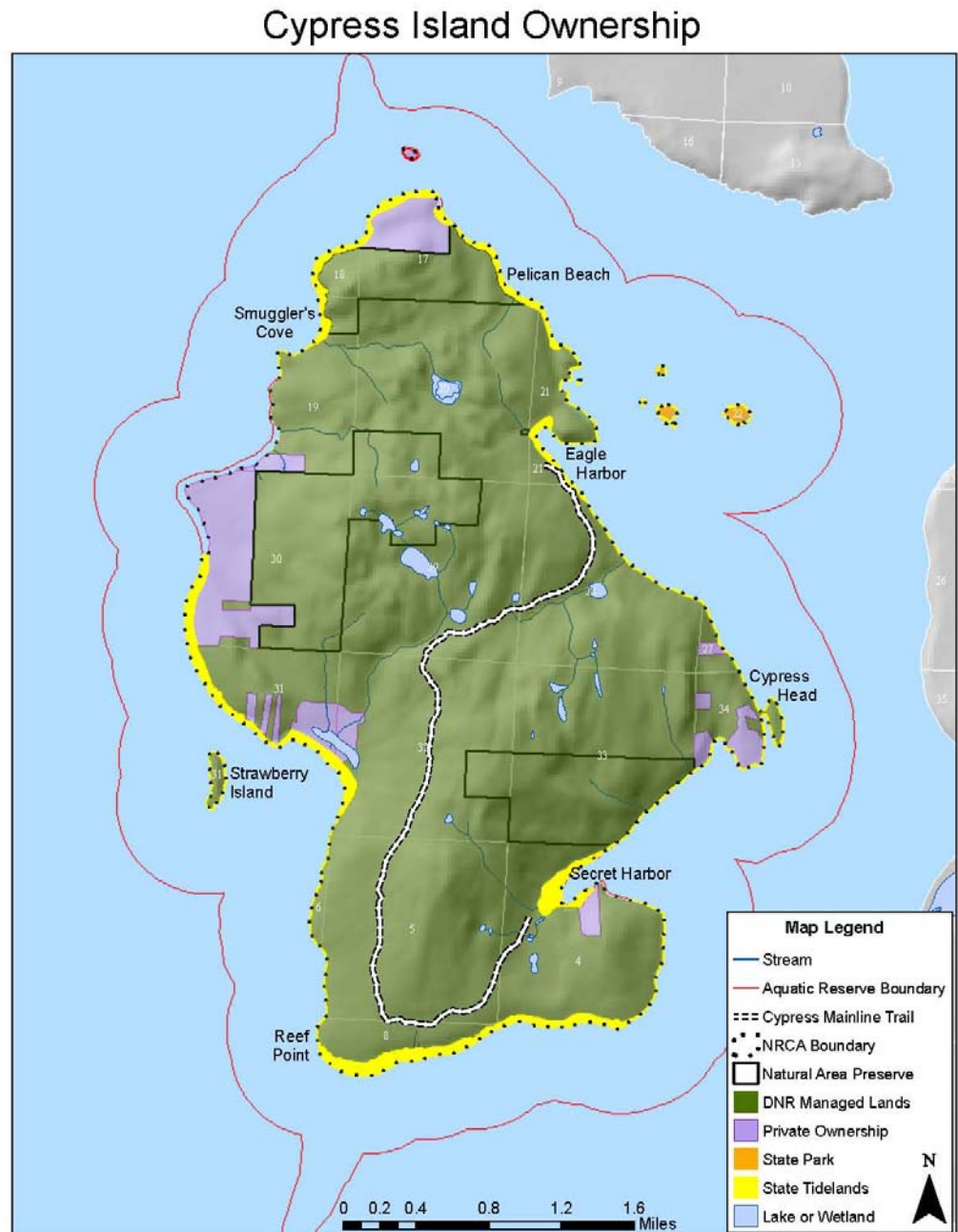
**Table 1: Cypress Island Ownership**

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Approx. acreage</b>
NRCA	4,028
NAP	1,073
Aquatic Reserve	5,910
Total DNR Management Area	11,011
Private Property	480

**NOTE:** The plan does not apply to private property on Cypress Island

## Figure 4: Cypress Island Ownership

For a color version of this figure see [www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/aqr/reserves/home](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/aqr/reserves/home)



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## **Relationship to other Federal, State, Local, and Tribal Management**

The successful management of Cypress Island will require coordination and collaboration with public and private entities as well as local, state, federal, and tribal government.

### **Tribal Interests at Cypress Island**

Cypress Island is located within the following tribal usual and accustomed areas:

- Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe
- Lower Elwha Kalallam Tribe
- Lummi Nation
- Nooksack Tribe
- Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe
- Skokomish Tribe
- Suquamish Tribe
- Swinomish Tribe
- Tulalip Tribes

In addition, the Samish Indian Nation has identified significant historical and cultural ties to the land and water of Cypress Island.

Conservation goals and management activities identified in this management plan are not meant to conflict with Tribal treaty, natural resource, or cultural interests. The DNR will cooperatively work with the tribes to protect archaeological sites, and allow access to cultural sites; and allow for treaty-protected hunting and gathering of resources in a manner that fosters the sustainability of those resources.

### **Marine Biological Reserve**

Much, if not all, of the marine area of the Cypress Island site was designated as a Marine Biological Reserve by the state legislature in 1923. The Marine Biological Reserve was established to create an area that protected and preserved marine biological materials useful for scientific purposes. Under the Marine Biological Preserve’s statute (RCW 28B.20.320), the collection of any marine biological materials other than that taken for food, and also excepting kelp, is prohibited unless written permission is obtained from the Director of Friday Harbor Laboratories.

### **County Land Use Designations**

The shoreline is zoned conservancy in the Skagit County Shoreline Master Program. Ninety percent of the uplands are zoned open space and the remaining 10% is zoned 1 residential unit per 10 acres or 2 residential units per 10 acres if clustered. Three commercial salmon aquaculture net pen facilities operating in Secret Harbor are permitted by Skagit County.

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### **Cypress Island Residents**

Approximately 115 private parcels exist on Cypress Island. The DNR will continue to work cooperatively with these property owners on the management of the NRCA, NAP, and Aquatic Reserve.